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SUBJECT: The Pope's Europe: Whole, Free and Faithful

Summary

1. (U) From the start of his Pontificate, Pope John Paul II has had a clear vision of Europe as a continent united, free, and faithful. As an inspirational symbol for the Polish nation and a formidable voice for freedom, the Pope played an essential role in overcoming Europe's political divisions and restoring freedom to the East. Today, as NATO and the EU move ahead to deepen European unity and entrench democracy, the Pope has increasingly turned his attention to Europe's faith -- or, more accurately, its lack thereof. In his view, Europe must play a leading role as a force for peace in the world, but will not be able to fulfill this role unless it returns to its spiritual roots. His desire to complete his vision of a Europe whole, free, and faithful is so strong that he has devoted an increasingly large share of his limited energy to achieve recognition of Europe's Christian roots in the EU Constitution and to build bridges with Europe's Orthodox East. His efforts to reinforce European unity and strengthen its respect for core values of freedom and human rights continue to make this pope an important ally for the U.S. in our efforts to work with Europe to promote human dignity worldwide. End Summary.

Freedom and Faith from the Atlantic to the Urals

2. (SBU) Ever since the pope from the East took up the papacy, John Paul II has been driven by a fervent belief in a united Europe founded on Christian values stretching from the Atlantic to the Urals. In the Pope's words, he wanted a Europe breathing with two lungs -- Western and Eastern, Roman and Orthodox, as distinct expressions of the same culture. This vision has animated the Vatican's diplomatic efforts in Europe. In the early years of his pontificate, John Paul II's European engagement focused on overcoming the division created by communism, while his post-Communist focus has been on building a united Europe rooted in Christian values that can be a force for good worldwide in promoting the primacy of human dignity and rights.

3. (U) John Paul II saw in his election to the papacy a divine mandate to take up the defense of the oppressed in his native Poland and elsewhere in Eastern Europe. From the outset, his efforts against communism were less the work of a statesman or a diplomat, though he unhesitatingly delivered his message of freedom to Poland's Communist leaders. Instead, his efforts were those of an inspirational pastor who provided his fellow Poles and others trapped behind the Iron Curtain tools of resistance that the morally bankrupt Communists could not match. A Polish pope with a remarkable flair for public relations, insisting day after day after day on the fundamental inhumanity of Communism and embodying in his very person the failure of Marxism-Leninism to defeat or tame Catholicism in East Central Europe, proved to be a powerful symbol of freedom.

4. (U) But where the Pope succeeded in providing a rallying point and unifying symbol for the oppressed in the East to reassert their dignity, he has been less successful in his post-Communist era efforts to revitalize the faith in secularized Western Europe. It is also unclear whether his efforts in the more religious East will halt the region's own slow slide towards secularism. As the Pope observed in his recent Apostolic exhortation, "Ecclesia in Europe," Europeans increasingly exhibit a "practical agnosticism and religious indifference," which have created an impression of living without spiritual roots. In fact, the Pope sees Europe to be "tragically suffering for a profound crisis of values that has led to a crisis of identity."

Moral Vision for a United Europe

15. (U) Rather than accepting this secular turn as inevitable, the Pope has instead been emboldened to press even harder for his fellow Europeans to use their newfound unity for good both within Europe and in the wider world. In his view, Christianity was the historical source of European unity -- the only force that united the diverse cultures, peoples, and languages into a coherent culture. He believes it remains central as the inspiration and foundation for essential European values: the dignity of the human person, respect for life and for the family,

freedom of conscience and religion, the promotion of authentic social solidarity and the primacy of the rule of law. The fact that modern Europe has given the world the concepts of democracy and human rights stems, the Pope insists, from its Christian heritage. He has therefore been urging modern Europe to reclaim fundamental Christian-inspired values, which can be summarized in the affirmation of the transcendent dignity of the human person, the value of reason, freedom, democracy, the constitutional state and the distinction between political life and religious life.

----- Christian Roots and the EU Constitution -----

16. (U) One focus of the Holy See's effort to reaffirm its Christian values has been its full-court press over the past year to secure some form of reference to Europe's Christian heritage in the new EU constitution. The Pope's determination on this issue was reflected in his almost weekly calls this past summer in public addresses for Europe not to neglect its Christian past. The Vatican's daily newspaper highlighted the Pope's sentiments with banner headlines asserting that "Europe is either Christian or it's not Europe." The Vatican believed that its close relationship with Italy and Italy's stewardship of the constitutional debate during its recent presidency offered perhaps the best chance for inserting the reference to Europe's Christian heritage in the Constitution. Despite Italy's best efforts, and the strong support of Poland and Spain, the Vatican was unable to overcome the secularist opposition from France in particular in the latest constitutional draft.

17. The Holy See's persistence in seeking this reference to Christian roots against strong opposition within some EU countries appeared to many -- even some within the Curia -- to exceed its potential relevance for Christianity's future in Europe. More important than a preambular reference to Christian roots, many argued, was language guaranteeing freedom of religion and ensuring that religious rights and privileges are enshrined in the new constitution. Specifically, the Holy See wants to ensure the right of Churches and religious communities to organize themselves freely, respect for the specific identity of religious confessions, provision for a structured dialogue between the EU and these confessions, and respect for the juridical status already enjoyed by Churches and religious institutions in various EU member states. All of these appear to be well on track.

18. (U) In pushing for a "Christian heritage" reference and other provisions relating to religion, the Holy See's principal goal appears to be to build a foundation from which to counter increasingly dominant secularist tendencies within Europe and to reinvigorate the role of religion in European culture. In this effort, it has considerable support from other religious groups. In fact, although the Holy See has recently been at the forefront of calls for the recognition of Christianity in a European Constitution, the idea initially emerged from a meeting of the Council of European Churches (CEC) -- a Protestant group. Only later did the Holy See and the Greek Orthodox join their voices to it as a means of enhancing the importance of religion in European society.

----- Overcoming Religious Divisions -----

19. (U) The Holy See's push for an acknowledgment of Christianity's role in the development of European culture should in no way be seen as inimical to healthy coexistence with other faiths within a multi-cultural, multi-religious Europe. This would run counter to the Vatican's extensive work in interreligious dialogue under John Paul II, and its interest in religious liberty all over the globe. Although dear to the Vatican's vision for Europe, the constitutional push is but one element of a Vatican approach to Europe that also seeks to repair the Catholic-Orthodox breach and improve relations with other religious groups in Europe -- including Jews, Muslims, Anglicans, and other protestant groups.

110. (U) The Pope's openings towards the Orthodox Church in

Romania, Greece, Hungary and Bulgaria have produced a climate of dialogue and respect that has replaced a history of spiteful accusations and mutual fear based on ignorance. To achieve this progress, the Pope has at times literally begged the Orthodox for forgiveness for historical sins and traveled thousands of miles to prove firsthand to the

Orthodox leadership that Rome seeks partnership, and not proselytism. The Pope's visit to the Patriarch of Constantinople in 1979, just 13 months after assuming the papacy, set the tone for his outreach to the Orthodox and established a strong Eastern orientation to the Holy See's ecumenism. The Pope has been less successful repairing the breach with the Russian Orthodox Church, though more out of the ROC's deeply rooted insecurities than a lack of interest or effort on the part of the Holy See.

11. (U) The Holy See's close dialogue with the Anglican Communion was recently complicated by the ordination of an active homosexual bishop in the United States, but both parties are seeking a way around this new "obstacle to unity." While formal dialogue talks scheduled for February were put on hold, the Vatican and the Anglican Communion did agree to establish a sub-commission to reflect on the ecclesiological issues raised by the ordination of the gay bishop. Similar problems had arisen when the Anglican Church began ordaining female priests and bishops, but the desire for unity will continue to drive the Holy See to seek solutions to these obstacles. Talks with the Lutheran World Federation are also ongoing and have resulted in several joint statements on theological issues. While the complete resolution of doctrinal differences with both churches is a long way off, the Holy See works with both Anglican and Lutheran churches to enhance the religious voice in Europe on issues such as the inclusion of a reference to Europe's Christian heritage in the new European Constitution. Though these relationships do not have the potential geopolitical impact that Catholic relations with the Orthodox, Jewish, or Muslim worlds have, in both these cases, patching theological rifts could also lead to cooperation between churches that could impact questions of war and peace, international aid funding, and other issues relating to development, poverty, and the family.

12. (U) In its broadest strokes, the Pope's vision of a religiously united Eastern and Western Europe -- a Europe "breathing with two lungs" that would in time overcome a thousand years of separation -- reinforces other ongoing efforts to overcome Europe's division, such as NATO and EU enlargement. While religious unity is still a distant dream, both between West and East and among Western groups, the growing cooperation between the Holy See and Eastern Orthodoxy, combined with growing political and economic unity between East and West, can open the door to the rise of a unity not seen since the days of the Byzantine Empire.

Dialogue with Jewish and Muslim Communities

13. (U) Beyond his push for Christian unity in Europe, the Pope is also determined to expand the Holy See's dialogue to Europe's other major religious communities -- Judaism and Islam. During his Pontificate, John Paul II has made great strides to improve relations with European Judaism, clearing the debris of centuries of misunderstanding and mistrust. His historic 1986 visit to Rome's synagogue -- the first visit of a Pope to a temple since the earliest days of the Church -- has helped generate an ever-deeper dialogue with European Jewish communities. The Pope's recent 'apostolic exhortation' on Europe emphasizes the common roots linking Christians and Jews, acknowledges and expresses regret for the Church's past contribution to anti-Semitism in Europe, and encourages dialogue and cooperation with Jewish faithful. The Holy See has condemned signs of renewed anti-Semitism within Europe, and can be counted on to work with the U.S. to counter such developments in the OSCE and in other fora.

14. (U) The growing influence of European Islam has led the Vatican to seek to expand its dialogue with Muslims in Europe to promote respect for traditional values and to build respect for the place of religion in contemporary Europe. The Holy See seeks a mutually enriching dialogue between various religious communities, which it believes can contribute to social and political harmony within Europe, especially with the arrival of increasing numbers of migrants from beyond the expanded European borders. At the same time, the Vatican remains concerned about what it terms a "notable gap between European culture, with its profound Christian roots, and Muslim thought." In this regard, the Holy See continues to lament the fact that religious freedom in Europe is not reciprocated in many Muslim states.

The Vatican's Agenda for Europe

15. (U) The Holy See is a strong advocate for European unity, believing that Christianity provided the initial unifying force that brought together Europe's diverse cultural traditions, and that it continues today to provide a unifying foundation of ethical and moral values for the continent. With the EU poised to bring in ten new members, the Vatican had hoped that the nations of 'new Europe' -- with their recent experience of religious repression -- would counterbalance the secularism and loss of faith in the West with a renewed focus on moral and cultural values. This drive accounts for the Pope's recent focus in his travels to countries of Central and Eastern Europe -- most recently to Slovakia and Croatia -- where he has cautioned the Catholic faithful to avoid the loss of faith and moral direction that has afflicted the countries of the West. After surviving 40 years under the boot-heel of communism in many of these countries, the Catholic Church regards itself as a significant moral authority and has demonstrated a willingness to place itself squarely in the debate on key public issues in countries like Slovakia, Poland and Croatia.

16. (U) The Holy See's central policy priority for Europe is a focus on "fundamental values" of the dignity of the human person, freedom, democracy, and constitutional order. In this regard, the Vatican will urge EU countries, old and new, to protect the rights of individuals and minorities; promote religious freedom; protect human life from conception to natural death; encourage family life based on the sanctity of marriage between a man and a woman; welcome migrants; and guarantee young people a future with work, culture and education in moral and spiritual values. The Holy See believes that new European institutions need to be more open to the religious dimension "rooted in authentic ethical and civil values." As the Pope told the Italian parliament in 2002, he wants to ensure that "the new foundations of the European 'common house' will not lack the 'cement' of that extraordinary religious, cultural and civil patrimony which has given Europe its greatness down the centuries." This is not to say that the Holy See is looking for an exclusively Christian Europe, but rather that it believes that without the cement of Christian influence, Europe will crumble into moral decay and "existential anguish" marked by a decline of the family, renewed ethnic conflicts, rising racism, inter-religious tension, and a selfish concern for personal interests over global solidarity.

Comment: Vatican's Vision and U.S. Interests

17. (U) John Paul II's vision of a united and outward-looking Europe rooted in Christian values faces considerable opposition from the powerful forces of secularism in Europe's West and from post-communist materialism and uncertainties in the East. In fact, the Pope's failure to ignite in the historic heartland of Catholicism a spiritual fervor for the twenty-first century has been perhaps the greatest frustration of his papacy. One commentator has described Catholicism in Western Europe as being "on life support," and in many countries, increasingly irrelevant. This perception is why, in the twilight of his pontificate, the Pope has sought with such insistence to shore up the breaches of traditional Christianity. For Pope John Paul II, the powerhouse for the construction of the new Europe of the third millennium should not be the legislatures of Brussels or Strasbourg, but the moral force of Christian values at the heart of European history and culture.

18. (SBU) Ironically, although the Pope remains sharply focused on Europe's spirituality, his greatest influence in today's Europe lies in the political realm. Europeans -- at least in the West -- may only infrequently heed the Pope's religious teachings, but in both the East and West they do listen to his political voice. His statements on terrorism, the Middle East, war and peace, international development, and inter-religious reconciliation are widely covered in the European press. As a result, the Vatican's vision for and actions in Europe can offer useful support for U.S. goals of promoting a unified, democratic Europe acting as an ethically motivated partner with the U.S. to promote democracy, freedom, and justice worldwide. Likewise, his voice in support of social and economic stability, the rule of law, and democracy throughout Central and Eastern Europe reinforces U.S. efforts to ensure the successful integration of the East into Western institutions. Finally, his caution to Europe to remain

open to the global community can help overcome European

self-absorption and foster a stronger and more morally-rooted European engagement with the world closer in line with U.S. priorities.

Nicholson

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